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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to demonstrate that an individual's occupational goals become adjusted to the position he is in---blocked goals tend to become of less interest and available goals are of increased interest, which tends to decrease dissonance. The author's hypothesis is that middle class occupational status occupants over a period of time shift their involvement in occupational goals, lowering them in high blockage areas and increasing them in low blockage areas to reduce cognitive dissonance. Salaried male employees (104) in various middle-sized industries in Michigan were selected for the sample. Using 25 possible goals areas in middle class occupations, with a scale measuring the amount of perceived blockage and involvement for each area, the study used age and tenure to measure the lengths of time the individual had been exposed to the blockage. General conclusions showed were that the negative relationship between the blockage and involvement factors shows a decided increase with an advance in age and tenure. (Author/SES)

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DISSONANCE REDUCTION THROUGH SHIFTING OCCUPATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

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Dissonance Reduction Through Shifting Occupational Involvement

We know relatively little about the nature of stress in our society, and even less about what people do to protect themselves from stress. The present article deals with both these factors, but especially the last.

We know that people have to be motivated to live up to the social expectancies related to a given status. A person is most satisfied when his goals are in line with what it is possible to achieve in the various positions he may hold. A person is stressed when the goals he desires cannot be reached. The question is, how does a person maximize his satisfactions and minimize his stresses? This problem can be usefully approached utilizing cognitive dissonance theory, and conceptualizing stress as a dissonance state.[1]

In answering this question we have studied one of the most important areas of a person's life in America- occupation. In attempting to seek satisfaction and avoid stress an individual (1) can move from one occupational position to another, or (2) he can shift his goals, decreasing his interest in those that are blocked, and increasing his interest in those that appear to be possible. This article is an attempt to demonstrate that an individual's goals, in time, become adjusted to the position he is in - blocked goals tend to become of less interest and available goals are of increased interest, which tends to decrease the dissonance. Whether the increasing correspondence of goals and interests (involvement) is brought about by occupational movement, or by shifts of interest and involvement in goals, cannot be decided fully without a study over time.

However, these data suggest the strong operation of the latter factor in addition to occupation movement. The studies of the American soldier show that soldiers were more dissatisfied with promotion where chances were greatest, and least dissatisfied where promotion was least. While this was studied as "relative deprivation," it shows a shifting of involvement in goals to meet reality.

In more stable societies individuals can be raised with stable goals firmly built into the personality. The individual can have great rigidity because he will surely go into a position where he can reach these goals.

The contemporary urban middle class - which is the group we are concerned with in this article - is continuously faced with a changing mass society. Individuals cannot be raised with rigid involvements, but they must be ready to shift to new goals depending upon the changing situations in which they find themselves. Reisman in The Lonely Crowd suggests this type of individual in the "other-directed" person. If there is no strong, integrated self-image, and if the individual remains responsive to the expectancies of others, then involvement will remain more flexible, so that it can be used in an expedient manner.[2]

Thus, our problem was stated in the following manner: Stress occurs in the individual when he is prevented from reaching his goals (this is an operational definition and does not imply anything about internal states), in our terms, when there is blocked involvement. There are several ways of conceptualizing the problem, such as: levels of aspiration, relative deprivation concepts, defense mechanisms, or cognitive dissonance theory. Dissonance theory would postulate a stressful imbalance arising from the dissonant cognitions of being highly involved in an occupational

goal at the same time that the goal is preceived as being blocked. There are many things one can do in this situation to reduce stress, but the one we wish to deal with is concerned with involvement. The reduction of either blockage or involvement will decrease the cognitive dissonance and the stress, but in many cases it is only the involvement that is under the control of the individual. So the individual may decrease his involvement in this blocked area and reduce his dissonance stress. The reverse also holds true, that the individual can increase his involvement in the non-blocked areas. Thus, the individual who can shift his involvements from blocked to non-blocked goals will experience less dissonance and more satisfaction.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the use of alcohol, which is sometimes a result of dissonant stress, fits into this approach. Alcohol tends to reduce the level of drives or involvements, and thus stress is reduced. But alcohol provides only temporary decreases, while we are interested in the relatively permanent dissonance reducing shifts in involvement.

Problem

In order to test whether individuals in an occupation reduced their involvement in highly blocked areas and increased it in low blockage areas, the best method would be to study individuals over a span of time. This procedure was not possible, so the next best method was used, in which those who had been in the blockage situation for a long time (as measured by both age and job tenure) were compared with those in the situation a short time. The problem stated as an hypothesis is: Middle class occupational status occupants over a period of time shift their involvement in

occupational goals, lowering them in high blockage areas and increasing them in low blockage areas, so as to reduce cognitive dissonance.

The occupational status of an individual assumes a major portion of his time and his activities. It provides a medium through which many of his goals and aspirations are fulfilled. This is especially true in the urbanized mass society where the job often becomes the most important point of anchorage for the individual. Social values, e.g., prestige and recognition, to a large extent, are derived from one's occupational role. Comparisons between age and job tenure categories might well indicate an increasing correspondence between actor goals and status expectancies for those individuals with sufficient experience in making maximum use of the opportunities available in the job situation.

Method

A sample of 104 males in various middle-class occupations (salaried employees in various middle-sized industries in Michigan) was selected. In the entire study, of which this is a part, we had developed about twenty sets of blockage and involvement scales (Guttman type). A set consists of two scales. Using interviews and scaling techniques we had isolated twenty-five possible goal areas in middle class occupations. For each area we developed a scale measuring the amount of blockage individuals perceived, and the amount of involvement they felt in this blocked area.

For the present study we have only used scales in five closely related areas which as a group are called social estimation.

The following questions are a sample drawn from the various scales, to indicate their nature and content. Space limitations preclude a complete presentation of the scales. The scales themselves are only incidental to

the hypothesis of our study.

1. Professional Prestige: blockage

   Are the people attracted to your type of job the kind that are looked up to by the community?

   _____ They are very much looked up to.

   _____ They are looked up to more than most.

   _____ They are about the same as others in this respect.

   _____ They are considered to be below others in this respect.

2. Professional Prestige: involvement

   Is it important to you that your job be considered a profession?

   _____ It is very important to me.

   _____ I feel this is quite important.

   _____ It isn't very important.

   _____ This means nothing to me.

3. Social Refinement: blockage.

   Some men report that their relationships with other people would be better if they had had more education. Is this true in your case?

   _____ Very true

   _____ True to a considerable extent

   _____ Somewhat true

   _____ Not at all true

4. Social Refinement: involvement

   Do you feel it is important to be considered cultured and refined?

   _____ Very important

   _____ Quite important

   _____ Somewhat important

   _____ Of little importance

5. Social Acceptance: blockage

In your contacts with people, how often are you accepted for what you are?

_____ Hardly ever

_____ Some of the time

_____ Most of the time

_____ Always

6. Social Acceptance: involvement

If you don't find ready acceptance into a group in which you are interested, how much does it bother you?

_____ Very greatly

_____ Considerably

_____ Somewhat

_____ Little or none at all

7. Social Value of Job: blockage

Do other people recognize the value to society of the work you do?

_____ Most people do

_____ Many do

_____ Some do

_____ Very few do

8. Social Value of Job: involvement

How important is it to you that your job be thought of as one which benefits humanity?

_____ It is of extreme importance.

_____ It is of considerable importance.

_____ It is somewhat important.

_____ It really doesn't matter.

9. Job Prestige: blockage

Some people in your kind of work find that their jobs are not particularly respected by the very persons whom they would like to have think well of their jobs. To what extent do you find this to be true?

_____ This is very true in my case.

_____ This is generally true.

_____ This is somewhat true.

_____ This is not at all true in my case.

10. Job Prestige: involvement

Do you like to have people feel that your job is important?

_____ Yes, I care very much.

_____ Yes, I care considerably.

_____ Yes, but it doesn't matter too much.

_____ No, I don't care how they feel.

For the sake of simplicity we collapsed the scale scores down into two ranks. Those high in blockage or in involvement and those low. The dividing line between high and low was made where it would most nearly divide the sample evenly between those in the top ranks and those in the bottom.

When both involvement and blockage are so dichotomized and used together, for any given goal there are four possible categories into which all individuals will fit!

(1) High Involvement -- High Blockage

(2) High Involvement -- Low Blockage

(3) Low Involvement -- High Blockage

(4) Low Involvement -- Low Blockage

In accordance with the operational definition of stress used, only those persons falling into category (1) would be defined as stressed, and facing a cognitive dissonance calling for change. The interest here is not in those individuals who are stressed (in terms of our definition), but rather in certain kinds of individuals who are not stressed. Specifically the interest is in the "non-stress categories (2) and (3). One can logically infer that persons falling into category (2) are not stressed: they are involved with a particular goal and encounter no barriers in obtaining it. And since stress supposes both actor motivation and situational interference, those individuals falling in category (3) are likewise non-stressed since they hold no motivation toward the goal in question, even though they perceive difficulty in the obtaining of the goal for others who are so motivated.

According to dissonance theory we would expect individuals to move out of category one to category three and possibly out of category four into two.

In order to see if these shifts were made we compared those who had been in the blockage situation a short time with those who had been in it a long time. We would expect that those in the situation a short time would be more apt to have high involvement in high blockage area (leading to dissonance), and also to have lower involvement in low blockage areas (not taking advantage of possible satisfaction). Those in the situation a long time would be expected to have shifted their involvement in line with

the blockage situation, having low involvement in highly blocked areas and high involvement in low blockage areas.

Thus, we needed some measure of the length of time the individual had been exposed to the blockage. We have used both age and tenure, neither one is quite satisfactory.

Again for simplicity of analysis age was treated as young or old, with the division occuring between those under or over thirty-five. This most nearly divided the sample in two. In the case of tenure the break was made between those with less than five years and those with more -- low and high tenure. This again split the sample most nearly evenly.

The following series of tables compare young and low tenure men, with old and high tenure men. Dissonance theory leads us to expect an increased negative relationship between blockage and involvement, for old and high tenure groups. Where blockage is high, involvement should tend to become low in time, and when blockage is low involvement should tend to become high. The young and low tenure groups should show less negative association than the old and high tenure groups where there has been more time for involvement to shift. Thus, there is evidence in support of our position if old and high tenure men show a greater tendency to a negative association of blockage and involvement than young and low tenure men. For the five goal areas tested we find that our prediction is fairly well realized. We have presented the blockage involvement relationship using both the Chi Square and Tetrachoric r methods. The Chi Square method is used because it is additive, and the results from all five areas can be combined to present the total relationship of blockage to involvement in all five areas of social estimation.

Table 1 deals with Professional Prestige. The blockage one faces in getting it, and the involvement or desire one has for it. In this article we will not deal with the actual content or meaning of the scales used, and present only little more than their titles. Our concern here is only with how involvement increases or decreases in any possible goal area related to occupations.

(Insert Table 1)

In the case of Professional Prestige the table shows that negative association between involvement and blockage hardly exists for the young age and low tenure groups, while it is quite high and statistically significant for the old age and high tenure groups. Thus, the tendency over a period of time, seems to be for individuals to increase involvement when in low blockage situations and decrease it in high blockage situations in respect to this goal.

Table two shows the relationship of blockage and involvement with regard to the goal of Social Refinement. Again the pattern is the same, one of increasing negative association with age and tenure. The negative association only becomes statistically significant for the old age and high tenure categories, this is what we expect as we don't anticipate a high degree of association for the young and low tenure categories.

Social Acceptance. The blockage and involvement items are concerned with the area of personal respect or esteem gained by the individual from among his occupational associates. The focus is upon the personal esteem accorded the individual rather than upon the social prestige accorded his status. However, it is obvious that the manner in which his occupational role is performed enters into the esteem received from the significant

others in the job situation.

(Insert Table 2)

It can be seen from Table 3 that the same pattern of negative association is present. However, the Chi Squares for the high tenure and old age tables are not significant at the usual levels of acceptance. And the tetrachoric r's for these tables reflect only a moderate amount of negative association between the blockage and involvement factors. Since the overall amount of association between the blockage and involvement factors for this area is relatively small (see Table 3), one would not expect to find major differences between the compared categories. One possible explanation is that the goal area of social acceptance shows less flexibility for most individuals than do the other areas of social estimation. Personal respect is likely to be closely associated with the individual's self conceptions and ego-needs, and he is neither willing nor able to shift his involvement readily with changes in the external environment. At least, involvement is not likely to be shifted in either direction with equal facilitation. In the absence of blockage, it is quite probable that involvement will increase. But in the presence of blockage, the reverse process of "disinvolvement" does not take place. The need is too fundamental a one to be substantially modified even in the face of persistent frustration. Although no attempt is made here to advance a systematic theory of personality dynamics, it is assumed that there is a wide range in the pliability of actor motivation. The willingness and ability to transfer desired goals are deeply rooted in the personality make-up of the social actor; the more core values, deriving from basic human needs, no doubt manifest great tenacity to withstand fluctuations

in structural opportunity.[3] Thus, dissonance reduction may not be equally possible in all areas.

(Insert Table 3)

Social Value of the Job. The material in this area attempts to show the extent to which the respondent believes that others recognize his particular occupation as being of value to society or beneficial to humanity as well as the intensity of his reactions to their judgments. In this instance, as in case of professional prestige, the reference group is the "generalized other."

It can be noted in Table 4 that the negative relationship between blockage and involvement associated with old age is present. However, this does not seem to be the case with high tenure. Whether the discrepancy for this particular area is to be attributed to the "atypicality" of the sample or to a real difference between the age and tenure factors must remain a moot question at this point. The writers are unable to justify the observed differences in terms of an analysis of the content of the items.

(Insert Table 4)

Job Prestige. This scale measures the extent to which the individual perceives his particular occupation as being one that is respected and considered important by others, and the degree to which he desires such recognition. Although the items are in some respects similar to those on the professional prestige scale, they are more closely geared to the desirability of power and influence than to generalized social honor.

The findings for this area are rather unsatisfactory. In the case of tenure, the pattern is there although the differences are not statistically significant. In the case of age, association is apparently random for both

old and young categories (Note Table 5). We can again raise the question as to "why the discrepance?" It should be noted that the social value of the job and the job prestige scales were originally assumed to represent a unidimensional scale universe. When the blockage items failed to follow a scale pattern, they were subsequently reordered to form two separate scales. The involvement items however proved scalable as a single dimension. The responses for this single involvement scale were plotted against the responses for the two blockage scales. This might possibly prove to be the interfering factor. Guttman has argued that content alone defines a universe of attributes, and that scalability per se is no arbiter between differences of opinion with respect to content.[4] A separation of involvement scale items to correspond more closely with the content of the items for the two respective blockage scales might result in patterns more in keeping with the overall picture.

(Insert Table 5)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

What general conclusions can be drawn from the data presented? In reviewing the findings presented in Table 1 through 5 we note the following:

(a) With one exception, association (as measured by tetrachoric r) is greater for the old age and high tenure categories in all areas of social estimation than for comparable young age and low tenure categories. The negative relationship between the blockage and involvement factors thus tends to show a decided increase with an advance in age and tenure.

(b) The individual Chi Squares correspond to usual levels of acceptance in four instances within the "old age" and "high tenure" tables and in none within the "young age" and "low tenure" tables, as is predicted by our hypothesis.

And from Table 6, it can be observed that when the several Chi Squares are summed within each of the age and tenure groupings, P is less than .01 for old age and high tenure whereas no acceptable level of significance is obtained for the compared young and low tenure classes. Considering all five goal areas of social estimation, one would expect this pattern of association between blockage and involvement to arise less than 1 time in 100 by chance for the old age and high tenure categories.

(Insert Table 6)

Thus it appears that the older age and longer tenure categories include a large number of persons adapted to the job, either because they were from the outset suited to the particular status or because they subsequently had learned to fit their involvement to status opportunities so as to reduce dissonance. Although both types provide a picture of adaptation of actor-in-status, the latter has especial relevance for the problem of personality resilience. It can be seen that one important resource technique in role adaptation is the individual's ability to bring his interests and aspirations in line with the situational possibilities for achievement. This supposes a capacity on the part of the individual for maximizing the situation in which he finds himself, i.e., of being able to change his areas of goal involvement in accordance with the opportunities provided by the status he occupies.

It is to be remembered that these findings are based on a "middle class" segment in terms of the social estimation character of their occupational statuses. Although a preliminary analysis of certain other areas of the job status suggests similar techniques for adaptation, we have no definite evidence that the processes of involvement flexibility,

dissonance reduction, and status migration are operative for these other alternatives cases. And insofar as other social statuses are concerned, we can only speculate in light of what seems to occur in the occupational situation.

There remains the fact that all individuals in the high tenure and old age categories do not manifest the typical negative association between blockage and involvement. Evidently, some individuals do not readily change their goals even though they cannot or will not change their status location. And similarly, any particular individual is not likely to show equal resilience with respect to all his goals. It was pointed out above that, even with the respect to social estimation, the flexibility of involvement process does not seem to operate with equal effectiveness in all the scale areas. It is highly probable that many goals are not easily relinquished by the individual in spite of lack of opportunity for their realization. And similarly, the mere presence of a chance to realize a certain objective goal does not automatically precipitate actor motivation toward that goal. However, our most general hypothesis has been supported by the data, that there is reduced dissonance and stress over time and job satisfaction increases.

The research offers some support for dissonance theory and shows its utility in understanding and making predictions about important kinds of social phenomena. Whether the decrease in dissonance over time was the result of involvement changes or due to shifts of personnel in and out of the occupations to find less dissonant situations the data still support an hypothesis of dissonance reduction. It is generally granted that involvement reduction (a lowering of the level of aspiration) is one of the cheapest defense mechanisms against dissonance and stress, yet further research should look into these involvement areas (or those types of personalities) where involvement is not easily shifted, and what factors maintain dissonance.

Table 1

Indices of Association Between Blockage and Involvement in the Area of Professional Prestige for All Age and Tenure Categories.

Age or Tenure Categories	N	Chi Square	Level of Significance	Tetrachoric r
35 Years of Age or Under	56	.0004	P is greater than .98	-.03
Over 35 Years of Age	48	4.15	P is less than .05	-.46
5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	64	.22	P is less than .70	-.10
Over 5 Years of Job Tenure	36	5.6	P is less than .02	-.57

Table 2

Indices of Association Between Blockage and Involvement in the Area of Social Refinement for all Age and Tenure Categories.

Age or Tenure Categories	N	Chi Square	Level of Significance	Tetrachoric r
35 Years of Age or Under	55	1.12	P is less than .30	-.24
Over 35 Years of Age	48	6.36	P is less than .01	-.57
5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	66	3.16	P is greater than .05	-.33
Over 5 Years of Job Tenure	36	5.6	P is less than .02	-.61

Table 3

Indices of Association Between Blockage and Involvement in the Area of Social Acceptance for all Age and Tenure Categories.

Age or Tenure Categories	N	Chi Square	Level of Significance	Tetrachoric r
35 Years of Age or Under	54	.003	P is greater than .95	-.01
Over 35 Years of Age	48	1.33	P is less than .30	-.29
5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	64	.33	P is greater than .50	-.13
Over 5 Years of Job Tenure	36	2.53	P is greater than .10	-.46

Table 4

Indices of Association Between Blockage and Involvement in the Area of Social Value of Job for All Age and Tenure Categories.

Age or Tenure Categories	N	Chi Square	Level of Significance	Tetrachoric r
35 Years of Age or Under	57	1.02	P is less than .30	-.22
Over 35 Years of Age	47	3.37	P is greater than .05	-.42
5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	66	1.18	P is less than .30	-.22
Over 5 Years of Job Tenure	35	1.02	P is greater than .30	-.29

Table 5

Indices of Association Between Blockage and Involvement in the Area of Job Prestige for All Age and Tenure Categories.

Age or Tenure Categories	N	Chi Square	Level of Significance	Tetrachoric r
35 Years of Age or Under	57	.67	P is less than .50	-.16
Over 35 Years of Age	47	.20	P is less than .70	-.16
5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	63	.13	P is greater than.70	+.09
Over 5 Years of Job Tenure	34	1.27	P is less than .30	-.31

Table 6

Chi Squares for Blockage and Involvement in All Areas

of Social Estimation for All Age and Tenure Categories

Scale Areas	35 Years of Age or Under	Over 35 Years of Age	5 Years of Job Tenure or Under	Over 5 Years of Job Tenure
Professional Prestige	.0004	4.15	.22	5.6
Social Refinement	1.12	6.86	3.16	5.6
Social Acceptance	.003	1.33	.33	2.53
Social Value of Job	1.02	3.37	1.18	1.02
Job Prestige	.67	.20	.13	1.27
Total Chi Square:	2.81	15.91	5.02	16.02
df:	5	5	5	5
P:	$>.70$	$<.01$	$>.50$	$<.01$

Footnotes

1. Cognitive dissonance, "that is, the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right.... The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance." Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1957, p. 3. Some of the work related to the problem of this article is as follows: Allen E. Bergin, "The Effect of Dissonant Persuasive Communications Upon Changes in a Self-referring Attitude," J. of Personality, 30 (Sept., 1962), pp. 423-38. Philip Worchel and Betty L. McCormick, "Self-concept and Dissonance Reduction," J. of Personality, 31 (Dec., 1963), pp. 588-99. John Gullahorn and Jeanne E. Gullahorn, "Role Conflict and its Resolution," Sociological Quarterly, 4 (Winter, 1963), pp. 32-48. Jack W. Brehm and Arthur R. Cohen, Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962, Esp. ch. 10. Robert B. Zajonc, "The Concepts of Balance, Congruity and Dissonance," Public Opinion Quarterly, 24 (Summer, 1960), pp. 280-296.

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